



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THE STAKE OF THE CHURCH IN THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT.

THIS paper is not an exhortation to the church to do its duty in social reform. It is not an appeal to conscience, but to the more delicately developed faculty of looking out for our own interest. I wish to show to all who believe that the church has an important function to fulfill in the complex structure of human society, that the future and welfare of this great institution would be impaired by social deterioration and advanced by true social progress.

Churches are institutions rooted in the national life; they will flourish if their soil is fertile of good; they will decay if it is barren and parched. Like other institutions the churches not only have duties to perform, but rights and interests of their own to guard. They own property; they employ men; they receive and disburse moneys. It stands to reason that anything which affects property, employment, and finances generally will affect the churches too. Of course with the church, more than with any other institution, the question of duty is paramount. If her duty collides with her interest, her duty must be done, though it tear the last shred of property from her naked body. But as long as there is no such collision, considerations of self-interest are legitimate; most of all if it can be shown that its duty and its self-interest in the wider outlook run parallel.

I shall endeavor to point out the stake which the church as an institution has in various phases of the social movement.

Take first the land question, the fundamental economic question. In all our occupations we need land, a *locus standi*. Even the push-cart peddler, who uses the public streets for his business with nearly as much freedom as if he were a peripatetic street-car company, needs a place to store his cart at night and another to store himself. The request of Archimedes, *Δὸς μοῦ στῆλ*,

"Give me a place to stand and I will lift the earth with a lever," is the modest request of every worker on earth, only that we expect to lift ourselves rather than the earth. Now religious work, as soon as it gets beyond the first itinerant stage, makes the same demand, and makes it increasingly. The churches need land for their work. And if so, any legal or social condition affecting the availability of the land will affect church work.

To take the extreme case: the monopoly of land in a certain district would give the owner the power of autocratic interference in the religious affairs of the district owned. I understand that Lord Salisbury as lord of the manor refuses dissent a standing place on his lands. Similar action has been attempted by corporations in this country.

Of course control so complete and so personal is rare, at least as yet. But it is not a rare thing for the conditions of land ownership to act at least as a check on church extension. If a church wishes to make itself socially useful to the community by erecting a parish house near the church, the first item to be considered is the price of the land needed. If it wishes to begin a mission for evangelistic work, the first item again is the rent of the store or hall. If land is readily obtainable and rent low, such expansion of church work is comparatively easy. If land prices and rents are high, church expansion is checked to that extent, unless the wealth and liberality of the members have grown in the same ratio as land values. In smaller cities or in the suburbs churches often grow out of cottage meetings or Sunday schools held in private houses; but as population thickens and space grows dearer the former dwellers in houses become dwellers in tenements, and the free foothold is lost to church enterprises during their infancy. A certain church in New York thirty-five years ago maintained several missions simultaneously; several of these grew into churches, which in turn propagated. Recently the same church desired to enter into similar work once more. It is stronger now in membership and liberality, but it was found that no suitable store could be secured under fifty dollars a month and that amount was prohibitive.

The rise of land values acts as an automatic brake on church extension, and the worst of it is that the pressure of the brake grows strongest precisely when the free expansion of church work is most needed, namely, when population is congested. In no great city, so far as I know, do the churches keep pace with the growth of the population. Is this altogether due to the lethargy of the churches, or ought some of the blame to go to the nimbleness of land values?

Of course in so far as land values are regulated by a just and inevitable natural law we can have no quarrel with them. We cannot complain if the best sites are dearer than the worst. But in so far as land values are artificially enhanced by land speculation and by a vicious system of taxation, the churches have a right to cry out against the silken bands that are strangling religious enterprise in common with every other form of enterprise. Anyone who for purposes of speculation holds land in or about a city idle or partly idle contributes thereby to raise the price of every inch of soil in that town and hampers every church that wants to use land. And if our system of taxation taxes idle land more gently than improved land, and encourages speculation in land by allowing land owners to appropriate the increase in value created by the community, that system of taxation is as hostile to church work as to any other form of industry and progress. The church has a stake in the land question.

I wish some competent single taxer would tell us how churches would fare under the single tax. If the present exemption of church property from taxation continued under that system, it would practically cut in two the cost of securing a place of worship, and would enable the churches to devote their resources entirely to the erection of a suitable building. If total exemption were refused, partial exemption on some sliding scale might be permitted. And even if all government favors were withdrawn, and the church property were taxed evenly with other property, I doubt if they would be worse off than they are now. They would be situated then as if they were located on leased ground now, with the privilege of unlimited renewals. Moreover the

value of the ground used, on which the tax would be computed, would be lower than at present; first, because land now idle would be forced into use and would come into competition with all other land; second, because the speculative water would be let out of all land values. Then, too, it is on the whole juster to a corporation like a church, which is constantly renewing its membership, to tax its members evenly from year to year for the use of its ground, than to draw the entire purchase price from a single set of members in a few years. Practically this is usually impossible; most churches when they have secured property are compelled to carry a mortgage debt for a number of years, thus distributing the exertion over a longer term. But under the present system, after interest has been paid for years, the principal is still as big as ever and will have to be paid some time. Under the single tax there would be no principal to pay.

The only churches that would be less favorably situated under the single tax than under the present system would be old churches holding valuable land in down-town districts of our cities. At present they are often enabled to sell at a very great advance over the price once paid and with their booty to move up town, buy a fine site, and begin over again. This process would be stopped. If the stampede of the down-town churches were checked in this way, the mourning would be great, but not universal.

In the second place, the churches have a stake in the entire question of the distribution of wealth. If the present tendency to accumulation should continue; if the middle class should dwindle and our country be filled with a great proletariat—would the churches be profited thereby? We have Christ's word for it that the kingdom of God does not flourish among the rich. We have our own observation for it that it does not flourish among the very poor. The churches seem to thrive best among plain and sturdy people, who earn their living in the sweat of their own brows, but who are not harried beyond hope by the cares of the morrow or driven beyond their strength by the exactions of their

daily tasks. The churches have as much interest in looking after the permanence and prosperity of this class as the German peasant along the Rhine has in keeping intact the thin layer of ground on his hillsides from which his vines draw their sustenance.

If we come to have a well-defined wealthy class and a permanently poor class, we shall also have rich churches and poor churches, with a gulf fixed between them. Wealthy families will drift together. No amount of gush about rich and poor meeting together in the church, no amount even of real Christian sacrifice will be sufficient to overcome the silent social forces which will stratify people in the churches according to their wealth. The life of a wealthy man in a church of poor people is not altogether pleasant. Much is expected of him and little gratitude is given him. If he uses his managing capacity and the influence of his wealth he is accused of domineering and carrying the church in his pocket. If he is morally sensitive, the contrast between the poverty of his brethren and his own wealth will cause him constant social compunction and spiritual unrest, and after all he will not feel that he and his family sustain real Christian fellowship with those about him. If his natural masculine democracy can overcome the hindrances, it is a question if his wife will do the same. Sooner or later there will be a turn and the family will pass gracefully into a church composed of their social equals and ministering to the æsthetic tastes created by wealth. As surely as great differences in wealth exist, so surely will they manifest themselves in church life too.

As the poorer churches lose their best contributors they find it harder to pay their way. Even now it is almost impossible for a church in New York composed entirely of working people to equip and maintain its own worship, especially against the competition of wealthier neighbors. Outside aid is called in. But where permanent financial help is given some degree of control usually has to be conceded. The weak church is turned into a "mission" or reduced to some form of vassalage. Or it comes under the control of some larger organization and that again is

managed by men with time and money to spare. Even among the free churches a "bastard episcopacy, based on money only," grows up, with all the dangers of an ecclesiastical episcopacy and none of its spiritual power. The independence and self-government of the local churches, which are justly cherished by our most American denominations, will under such circumstances decay in fact, though still maintained in theory. These conditions are even now blighting the manliness and the Christian initiative of the churches.

The distribution of the national wealth also affects the income and efficiency of missionary and benevolent societies. If the income of the people sinks to the bare cost of living, there is little margin for missionary contributions. The widow's mites were large in the sight of God, but the trustees of the temple fund could not make them go very far. On the other hand the gifts of the rich, while often dazzling by their splendor, are actually small compared with their superfluity and in proportion to the total wealth controlled by them. The best and steadiest givers, if properly educated to give, are people of steady income who have a fair margin above the immediate necessities of life. To put the case concretely, imagine two churches; suppose that the aggregate income of the members in the one is about as large as in the other, say \$150,000 a year. But in the one church this income is divided about evenly among 100 families, averaging \$1500 a year; in the other there are 100 families receiving about \$500 a year, and two families with \$50,000 a year each. Under ordinary circumstances it can safely be predicted that the former church would give more steadily and liberally to missionary purposes than the latter.

If wealth concentrates in few hands, the churches will become more and more dependent on a few rich men for all larger undertakings. It would even now disturb the equilibrium of the denominations if some rich giver became alienated, or if he died and his heirs preferred another denomination. Such dependence of the churches on men of worldly power and often of worldly mind would contain the essence of that dependence of the church

on the state from which American Christianity has cut loose. It would expose the churches to dictation by those whose spirit cannot well be in sympathy with pure Christianity. The churches have everything to gain from a fairly even distribution of wealth. They would thrive best in a population in which there would be neither great fortunes nor solid poverty. It is therefore to their interest to assist in securing a condition in which every man would obtain an approximately fair return for his work, and nothing more.

In the third place the church has an interest of its own in the hours and conditions of labor. The demands on the vitality and vigor of all classes of workers are greater today than in former ages, and greater in America than on the more leisurely continent. Under our competitive methods of production and under the whiplash of American intensity the pace is fearfully rapid. If in addition the food and housing of the workers are inadequate, the consumption of vitality is ruinous. The efforts of organized labor to maintain the Sunday rest and to shorten the weekly hours of labor are intended to check in a measure this rapid exploitation of the vitality of workingmen.

The churches, at least according to the American conceptions of church life, are largely dependent on the voluntary labor of their members. The gospel of work is preached incessantly. In the Sunday school, the sewing school, the evangelistic meeting, and in all its multifarious work a modern church may be officered by paid workers, but the rank and file are volunteer workers. These men and women voluntarily add this religious and philanthropic work to the weekly stint of work by which they earn their daily bread. It is plain that the more completely their professional work consumes their working force, the less will they have left for the work of the church. How can a young woman put any brightness and sustained charm into her Sunday-school work if she has been standing for eleven hours a day behind a counter, perhaps without a chair to sit down in even during the intervals of her work? How can a man travel up



and down tenement stairs and stand the physical and mental wear of house-to-house visiting when he has been working all the week in an ill-ventilated shop amid the clang of machinery? They do this extra labor; they rejoice in doing it; but often they break down under it. It is grand; it is also heartbreaking.

Our type of church life, with its abundant use of volunteer labor, makes the churches dependent on some measure of leisure and surplus energy among their members. In the measure in which the people are drained of their strength by excessive hours of labor, and by poor ventilation, insufficient noonday rest, etc., in that measure the churches are robbed of their workers. In really poor districts the churches even now depend mostly on paid labor and on the help of workers of the upper classes from other churches. But that is a retrograde tendency, and if it became general would change the very type of the religion preached.

That leads us to another point. The increasing social distress and degradation of the people has led to the establishment of the so-called institutional churches. There are but few churches in every city conspicuous for their institutional features, but scarcely any churches have entirely escaped the influences of this tendency. It has modified them all. This is greatly to the credit of the churches. However ill considered some of the manifestations may be, it is at any rate an effort to cope with a sad situation in a Christly spirit. But that does not do away with the fact that a fearful burden has thus been imposed on the churches. Institutional features greatly increase the cost of church work. They make immense demands on the energy, care, and organizing ability of the leaders. Unless there are ample funds to employ paid helpers, the extra work will mostly fall back on the pastor. It is like increasing the diameter, weight, and revolutions of a fly-wheel without increasing the size of the axle around which it spins. Insurance agents ought to regard the pastor of an institutional church as a bad risk. It is murderous work. And the more willing and consecrated a man is, the faster will it wear

him out. If this is inevitable, ministers must e'en get nervous prostration and creep away to a hole to die. "*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.*" But if it is a needless sacrifice, ministers have a right to object against being made the scapegoats of others. By the great primal law of self-preservation they have a right to object against the way human wreckage is being dumped down on them to cure and set up again. When I was a boy of fifteen I was once set all alone to stack the straw turned out by an eight-horse threshing machine. My frantic efforts under that inexorable stream of straw were a foretaste of later experiences. If an active city pastor will compute the time he has spent during the last three years in turning himself into an employment bureau and dealing with out-of-works, he will realize how much his work and welfare are affected by social conditions.

In one way this philanthropic work has given a wholesome bent to modern church life. But there is always danger that the distinctively spiritual work will be crowded to one side. Those who object to the institutional church as a perversion of the church are not altogether wrong. It was an early experience of the apostles that they could not "continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word" if they had to "serve tables." Nor is the moral effect on the people purely good. Wherever something is to be had for nothing, cupidity is aroused, and the spiritual work of the churches will have to be done through a clinging and blinding vapor of self-seeking and hypocrisy.

The institutional church is a necessary evil. The people ought to be able to provide for themselves what the churches are trying to provide for them. If the people had comfortable homes, steady work, and a margin of income for the pleasures of life, they could look out for themselves and the churches could prune off their institutional attachments. While social conditions were simple and wholesome there were no institutional churches; the family and neighborhood could attend to the isolated cases of sickness and need. Make social life healthy and you can simplify church work. Let poverty and

helplessness increase, and the work of the churches will increase too. The more Christlike they are, the more unbearable will their burdens become. Certainly the churches have a stake in the social movement.

A still subtler detriment suffered by the church through social deterioration is that the morale of its members is impaired and its reputation in the community weakened. It is a commonplace of the statistics of crime that periods of financial depression are accompanied and followed by an increase in all forms of crime against property. Men are pushed hard and cross the lines of legality. But statistics take no account of those who are pushed across the line drawn by their own conscience or the conscience of their moral community. Any attentive observer must have noticed the havoc wrought by the last three years. I have seen church members take positions in the liquor trade against the protest of their conscience and their social pride. Christian men remain in business situations where they have to lie habitually on behalf of their employers; they are afraid they will find no other position. The distress of this last winter has reached even the women who have hitherto found work by washing, scrubbing, etc., and widows who have heretofore maintained their self-respect are now living with men to whom they are not married in order to have bread and shelter for themselves and their children. This snapping of moral restraints is most injurious where there has been sincere striving to live a right life. There it is a sin against the light. Church members in such cases lose their self-respect; they get out of view of their church; they enter the class of publicans and sinners. The last three years have come like the devastating floods of the Mississippi and have swept away what the church has erected with infinite labor. What if the downward movement of these years should become in a measure permanent? Has the church no stake in these questions?

Anything that impairs the morale of the church also impairs its reputation for moral superiority. It is perhaps the instinct

of human equality in a morbid form which prompts men to seize so eagerly on the sins and inconsistencies of church members and to argue from single cases that they are no better than other people and probably worse. But in spite of all that, the church still has a reputation, and that reputation is its stock in trade, its good will, its source of authority. To weaken it is to weaken the efficacy of the church and frustrate its work.

The harder it is under our social environment to do the plain righteousness demanded by the standards of everyday life the less likely is it that Christians generally will live up to the more exacting demands of the peculiar morality of Jesus, which is theoretically the standard of the church. Jesus demands that we shall not lay up treasures on earth, but shall live like the birds, without care for the morrow. It is comparatively easy to venture on a life of obedience to this command if one is sure of an opportunity to earn a living through every coming year. But when a man's trade regularly has five months of work and seven months of idleness, and when men are crowded out by younger men and turned adrift as soon as the signs of age set in, it becomes pretty hard not to scrape together treasure while there is anything to scrape. Christ demands that we shall love our neighbor as ourselves. That is comparatively easy when it is clear that my neighbor is my coworker and that his prosperity involves my own. But if there is only one job for the two of us and it is a question between us who will snatch it, or if I can make my business pay only by drawing my neighbor's customers, it becomes difficult to love him as well as myself. I do not say that it becomes impossible; there are heroic souls that trample on impossibilities. But for the mass of Christian people obedience to the ethics of Jesus becomes more remote as the social conditions in which they live make the practice of the ordinary virtues harder. A socialist in Germany said to me that if ever the commune was established that would be the first fair chance for those who desired it to live according to the precepts of Jesus.

But the farther the church lags behind its own acknowledged

standard of life the worse it is for its reputation. The charge of insincerity is made angry and incisive by the feeling of wrong done to society by the church. Men feel that the church by inefficiency and cowardice is responsible for the social ills under which they suffer. That is a tribute to the latent moral power of the church. There is no such feeling toward any other organization. The secret societies of our country are large, wealthy, influential, composed of picked men, and many of them ostensibly formed to further the cause of humanity. I have met with no anger against them because they have left the social problems unsolved; not because they are doing all they can, but apparently because nobody thinks they have any saving power in them. But the church is covered with reproach and accusations. It stands indicted for culpable neglect and malfeasance in office, and such a charge is no more pleasant for a body of men than for an individual. It is not only a question of duty and the will of God. It is to the interest of the church to save its reputation and have the good will of its fellow-men. Does the salt of the earth enjoy being cast into the street and trodden under foot of men?

Finally, it seems to me that even the mystic spiritual life of the church, its trust in God and fellowship with him, must suffer in the midst of social decay. I believe in the victorious power of the spiritual life. Faith can overcome the world and glory even in tribulation. I have seen holy lives unfolding in the most depressing surroundings, like edelweiss at the edge of a glacier. But Christ bids us pray that we be not led into temptation, knowing that the stronger the temptation the fewer will resist.

Walter Besant, in contemplating the sordid life of the East End of London, raises the question if there has ever been a great city that was really religious. I do not know; but I am sure that there is no great city in which modern industrialism has set up its smoking and flaring altars of Mammon in which religion is not struggling for its life like a flower growing among the cobble stones of the street. The larger our cities grow the less hold does religion seem to have over the multitude of men and

the general life. The church is inquiring for the cause with compunctions of conscience and anguish of heart. It has sought to improve its organization, to try new methods, to elicit more funds. It has blamed the tired workers for their lack of success. But still it looks like a losing race. Is it not perhaps true that as the social life of the people grows sordid, as the home and family life are contracted and crushed, and as the future looms up in dreary uncertainty and hopelessness, the religious sense of the people is choked and the natural basis for the religious life dwindles? For one thing, the people of our great cities are cut off from nature and from nature's God. All that they see and touch was made by man. To men in Chicago the heavens do not declare the glory of God, for they are covered with smoke. To us in New York the firmament showeth but an insignificant fragment of his handiwork between the cornices and fire escapes of the tenements. Her children in the city suck no sweetness from the bosom of mother earth, for her bosom is covered with asphalt and flagstones. Suppose a modern Job were sitting with his friends in a tenement in New York and reasoning about God. Suppose God wished to reveal his majesty to him, as he did to ancient Job; how would God do it? The wild ass and behemoth and leviathan convey no impression of ungovernable freedom, and of a strength yielding only to God, as they munch their food behind the bars at Central Park. The rain and the snow carry no sense of awe, for the street-cleaning department attends to such things promptly. The reverence in face of the vastness of nature, the delight in her beauty and her gifts, and the fear of her power, are almost eliminated in a great city, and thereby one of the influences which predisposes to religion and educates us for the spiritual life is wiped out. Men see and know the works and the cleverness of man and in that they believe. As for God, they know of him by hearsay. And so the soil in which the church has to sow its seed is trodden hard or washed away, leaving the bare rock.

Has the church no stake in the social movement?

NEW YORK CITY.

WALTER RAUSCHENBUSCH.